

Why Hope?

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I was born with a heart defect, doctors were uncertain if they could do such a risky costly surgery on a little colored child in 1959. They debated, my parents challenged the hospital and two years later my life was saved. Following my surgery the hospital moved that procedure out of the city making it inaccessible for Black folks in Philadelphia. There was no justice and there was no peace.

When I was a kid my great grandfather who was born just after the emancipation proclamation told me about his mother who had been enslaved. His mother was a seamstress who freed herself. She needed work and she got a job sewing confederate flags. She used the money to buy her relatives out of slavery. Her husband was murdered by white children for fun. They took out his eyeballs for marbles. There was no justice and there was no peace.

When I was a kid my grandfather told me about how proud he was to be a soldier in WWI. He loved the uniform because the women in France said he was a good looking Negro. When he and his best friend came home to the Delaware/Maryland area, they were chased by a gang of white men. They caught my Pop Pops friend and lynched him. My pop pop hid in some debris until it was safe to escape. At the lynching hundreds of white adults and children took pictures with his friend's charred body and then chunks of his body was distributed to the many that sought them to put in nigga jars.

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When I was teenager, I was a popular mischievous smart alec kid who took risks with the boys. We sat on the chains between the subway cars while it was moving 80 miles an hour underground. We jumped on the back of buses and held onto the ledge to ride to the next stop. We asked adults to buy us Boone's Farm apple wine at the state store. When the cops came, I could not run very fast, so I hid under cars. All of the boys were beaten and arrested at least once by the police and many went to Juvie. There was no justice and there was no peace.

When I was a young adult I took a boat to work on an island in Boston Harbor with black and white kids from South Boston high. We were teaching them leadership skills during the height of racial violence during the busing crisis in the early 80's. One day I had to take the late boat back to Dorchester Bay and walk a mile to the redline train station. On the way I was jumped by a gang of whites. I was left semi conscious on the ground after a brief but painful encounter. There was no justice and there was no peace.

When I was in my 30's I moved to Chicago, the most segregated city in America. One day I was driving and was pulled over by the police, not one time but 15 times in one year. I was ticketed and disrespected. There was no justice and there was no peace.

When I was in my 40's I worked in a maximum security prison with thousands of Black men piled like sardines seven floors high. I watched guards step on the heads of men and drag them down concrete staircases in races for entertainment. There was no justice and there was no peace.

Now in my 60's I see my country much the way I see this so-called President. Both behaving like an insolent child, a ravenous toddler, unable and uninterested in controlling or mitigating raw historical racist impulses to conquer and destroy black life. These eruptions against our humanity can happen at any time and at any place because anti blackness and white supremacy are in the bedrock of this nation. The

slightest tremor can shake the ground beneath our feet and then that foot of gleeful control steps on our collective necks. This country who hears my pain as white noise, who sees my blood as inconvenient puddles for their feet to step over. This country has weathered black bodies with stress and illness. This country, whose structures and machinery of injustice continue to create new ways to separate my head from my body. You see, America loves our black bodies, to throw a ball on a field, labor in the industries of capital, for sexual fantasies and the provision of entertainment. But our black heads, not so much, our heads that create black towns after slavery, our heads that innovate, our heads that do complex math, our heads that write novels, our heads who smile and joke with generativity despite the terror. Our heads that have figured out how to survive, how to take care of ourselves, our dignified heads that are held high and most of all our heads that speak truth to power.

For the American antiblack movement, it is that head of George Floyd, his head with Kinky hair, his head with a broad nose, his head with full lips, his head with dark brown skin. It is that head that the anti black agenda seeks to sever from his body. so white supremacy can feed on him like zombies feed on brains.

The killer cop that kneeled on George Floyd's neck lingered with childish glee and institutional sanction thinking that this was OK. That this was acceptable to do. He looks bewildered at all the fuss as he casually keeps his hand in his pocket just passing time on a black man's neck. After all, George was not human. You can not hear the pleas of a non-human, you can not respond to the life being sucked out of a non-human. You can kill him to obliterate breathing blackness, speaking blackness, thinking blackness. The machine of white supremacy is so well oiled not to see, or hear or feel. It is a cold and calculating gadget with one singular laser focused objective . To kill me in the most comprehensive and thorough manner slowly thorough policy and infrastructure, or suddenly through the deprivation of oxygen. This machine with its intricate screws ground into my ancestral body. This machine that has robbed black people of our liberty

and who profited by this theft every hour that we live, have no moral ground on which to stand. It is the humiliated, incarcerated, mutilated, and terrorized black body that serves as the vestibule for this democratic republic.

All my life I have heard that it was going to take time for America to change. I believed it and I worked for it. But I have a message to my own childish aspirations from the Me Too Movement.... Time's up!!!! How much time does it take to see us as human? How much time does it take for our pleas to be heard? There is a great relief at saying time's up. It means that something else is going to happen? It means an end of something? It means now what? What it doesn't mean is hope for something better. It means actions for something better.

We are witnessing a shocking accumulation of injured and mutilated black bodies, particularly young black bodies. Our Unitarian Universalist liberal and progressive white communities need to ask themselves this question..... if we are truly progressing toward this "society-that-is-to-come (maybe)," why is black suffering increasing at such alarming rates? In response to this inquiry, are you telling your black siblings that they should remain hopeful, keep struggling, keep "hope" alive, and keep the faith?

I have come to the conclusion that hope is a deadly aspiration for Black people. When we hope we are still. Hope is a naive conundrum, that doesn't inspire action. Being hopeful comes from a place of lack and scarcity. Hope causes us to wait for things to happen to us rather than going out and creating those things for ourselves. While we hope, we continue to suffer, America depends on black people to wait and hope and pray, so white supremacy can continue maintaining and adding to our suffering. My great grandfather hoped and he and my family taught during the uprising in 1968 that the political arithmetic of this country is saturated with violence. It was founded on looting in Boston Harbor. It looted the land of Native folks. It looted the shores of Africa that brought me here, it looted the environment, it looted black communities of their

wealth. Thus, non-violence is a misnomer, or somewhat of a ruse. Hope is a Black-sacrifice. It is a violence directed toward the self. And it is useless.

Political hope has usurped the spiritual principle of hope and puts it in the service of extending oppression. The political hope is bound up with metaphysical violence, and this violence masquerades as a “solution” to the problem of anti-blackness.

This hopeful temporal, linear perfection is connected to troupes of “betterment” “struggle” “work”, and utopian multicultural futures. These conceptual instruments of political hope. will never obliterate black suffering or anti-black violence; these concepts only serve to reproduce the conditions that render our existence unbearable. Political theologians and optimists avoid the immediacy of black suffering, the horror of anti-black pulverization, and paint pictures of a “not yet-but-is (maybe)-to-come-social order”. Political hope becomes a vicious and abusive cycle of struggle—it is like putting a circle around an idea or object (black freedom, justice, relief, redress, equality, etc.) and making it inaccessible because it doesn’t really exist. Those with political hope propose a collective enjoyment as an answer to black suffering—they point to finding the joy in struggle, the victory in toil, and the satisfaction of symbolic action and the singing of songs from enslavement. How repulsive is it that in our very own hymnal there is the song “No More Auction Block for Me” White UU’s singing about toil and struggle, as black youth are slaughtered daily, black bodies are incarcerated as forms of capital, black infant mortality rates are soaring, and hunger is disabling the bodies, minds, and spirits of desperate black youth. These conditions are deep problems and singing spirituals does not address the terrifying fact that the world depends on black death to sustain white life.

They depended on my ancestors death but I am here to say time’s up again for Richard Johnson my great grandfather how said the end of slavery was a coffe break and went onto create numerous black businesses and employed much of his community in good jobs. Time is up for Walter Groomes, my pop pop who, like other black soldiers, was a

war runner messenger across explosives and came back home to be a Union Organizer at the Navy Yard. Time is up for Shirley Groomes, my mother a social worker and George Hutt, my father and engineer and politician who risked everything walking me across a racial barrier to enroll me into an all white school that had the resources they believed I needed for my education. My ancestors did not hope and wait. They acted and organized.

Friends, go now and try for a day to see what it is like to let go of political hope and imagine the creation of a spiritual.. human... life centered.. life giving... hope that is rooted in the reality of the world we have and not the one we dream of. Imagine the creation of a spiritual human life centered life giving hope that will be built with the black and white ashes left on Lake Street.